



Guidebook

To The Land

Of The

Green Isles



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Foreword

Herein lies the account of my travels in that mysterious kingdom known as the Land of the Green Isles. Lest this record be put down to the fevered imagination of a madman or the fiction of a notorious liar, let me assure you, Dear Reader, that the



Land of the Green Isles does indeed exist. One can hear the name of The Land whispered in roadside inns off dusty roads from the hills of Daventry to the sea of Tamir—especially on nights when the wind howls and the rain plays havoc on the window panes. The storytellers inevitably take on that same tone of voice they use when speaking of the Fairy Kingdom. I cannot vouch for the Fairy Kingdom since I have

yet to get a leprechaun in a position of compromise, yet, the Land of the Green Isles... Ah!...that is a place where the feet of a man can find solid ground and his eyes feast on such wonders!

My tale begins with a broken compass. I had taken passage on a ship bound east from Llewedor. Our destination was Serenia, yet in the second week out we encountered a terrible electrical storm. Waves crashed upon the deck of our little ship, the Round About, and lightning struck the sea all around her. At one point it even struck our secondary mast and we were saved from a fiery death only by the

lashing rain which quickly put out the fire. We felt sure that we were all dead men, yet on we bailed and strove throughout the night. After long hours of the terrifying labor, we found ourselves still afloat on the other side of the storm. At first light, the damage seemed minimal despite the lightning that had struck the ship, but by sunset the Captain was forced to announce that the instruments of navigation had been magnetized by the storm—the compass spoke east, yet the sun sank low over the right of our prow.

The Captain did his best to sail by older methods, by the sun and the stars. He assured the voyagers that there was nothing to fear. Yet we seemed cursed, for a dense cloud cover settled over the sky far into the horizon—and stayed. The *Round About* sailed like a blind man groping in a vast, unfamiliar room.

After a week, the Captain had to admit that we had missed our destination. There was no land to be seen anywhere. It was as if the storm had been another flood that had wiped civilization from the face of the Earth. With naught else to do we sailed on, by now so lost that turning around seemed futile. Who was to say that we were not turned around already?

A month later, I lay in a fitful sleep on my bunk—throat parched and skin stretched from the scant provisions allotted all hands from the near-empty hold below—when I heard the cry on deck, “Land Ho!” Startled from my sleep and exhilarated with hope, I sprang to the deck. The sky had cleared and its blue seemed a hue I had never seen. A sailor was wildly pointing off the prow where the bright green of a small body of land was dimly visible. The *Round About* responded as though leaping from the sea towards that remote shore.

Yet within the hour, the curse upon our ship took its final vengeance. As though enraged to see us within view of escape, the sea came alive and swirled around us.

Currents and whirlpools materialized and sucked at the beaten planks of the ship—turning her first one way and then another! I was thrown against the deck and rolled uncontrollably against the cables and the lifeboats. The last thing I heard before my head struck and blackness descended was the mate screaming, "She's going down!"

Who can judge providence? I am not a hero, I am a wanderer—neither as strong nor as brave as the Captain of that good ship. Yet with no effort on my part—none greater, in any event, than the skill of getting myself knocked on the head—I awoke the following morning, not among the bones at the bottom of the sea, but on a beach. Of the crew and passengers of the good ship, there was not a trace.

Perhaps I was chosen for some destiny here. Perhaps the sea simply found me too sour an old dog for the swallowing. In any case, that is the tale of how I found the Land of the Green Isles—or should I say, how it found me. Being but a poor traveler with feet that itch and a spirit that cannot rest, I have naught to leave this world but a record of the things these eyes have seen. Being not nearly as clever as a baladeer, I set this down in humble prose.

May this account someday find its way back to the land of my youth, though I fear I myself shall die on this distant shore.

Derek Karlavaegen

PART I

The Land of the Green Isles

The Land of the Green Isles is an ancient kingdom ruled by a royal family designated simply as the "Crown." Its location so far from the rest of the known world, combined with the dangers of the surrounding sea, have effectively isolated it from the influence of other lands. This small kingdom might as well exist on a distant star as on the other side of an inhospitable sea.



Because of this isolation, the citizens of the kingdom have a unique flavor and a quaint naivete. If one asks about the history of the Land, they are eager to speak. Yet of true answers, little can be found. They can recite the names of the holders of the Crown spanning back hundreds of years, can speak of each dwelling's origin, of practically every citizen's lineage, yet when I asked how the kingdom began, bewilderment is the response. "The kingdom has always been," they say, "There has always been a royal family." It is as if this place has existed, unaltered since the dawn of time.

But there is some basis for a different picture: that these islands have actually held a succession of kingdoms, each bleeding into the next, new civilizations building on ruins scarcely cold. I base this opinion on the traces and legends of an ancient civilization to be found on one of the islands—but more of that later.

The kingdom as it stands today, has remained relatively unchanged for hundreds of years. Four islands make up the bulk of the Land. The Isle of the Crown is the center of the kingdom. There on a magnificent rise stands the Castle of the Crown, the seat of the royal family of the kingdom and the heart of the Land. A village and docks comprise the rest of the island and run most of the kingdom's daily commerce, such as it is.

Across a short distance of sea is the Isle of Wonder, an aptly-named place of sheer delight ruled by a pair of rival queens who are, despite their own internal strife, unalterably loyal to the Crown.

The Isle of the Beast is the least hospitable of the islands. Seemingly deserted, I did not see much of the place since obstacles made it impossible to travel far inland. Nevertheless, the place has its own history and is listed among the kingdom's holdings.

The fourth island is the Isle of the Sacred Mountain, so called for the soaring peak that rises from the base of the island into the clouds, and around which that community—both literally and philosophically—is built. The Isle of the Sacred Mountain has its own rulers who are also subservient to the Crown.

A more dissimilar set of cultures can scarce be imagined than those on these four islands, yet they seem to exist in harmony and function as a whole. The uniting factor is the Crown, which maintains loyalty both by means of its undisputed heritage as the seat of all government, and by the grace of its goodly royal family.

Peace has reigned for centuries in this idyllic kingdom and seems likely to continue. That is, as long as the Land remains hidden from the evil that we know exists in the world. Though I am a stranger here, I hope not to influence this place overly much. Who would wish to change such a paradise?

Of the four islands, the Isle of the Crown is the one which will seem the most conventional to travelers from distant lands. It is largely inhabited by members of the human race, men and women of pleasant disposition and generous hospitality. As stated earlier, the Isle of the Crown is comprised of the Castle of the Crown, a quaint village, and the docks from which travel among the islands is commenced.

The Village

The village on the Isle of the Crown is a small one. Its stucco walls gleam in the hot sun, its dirt paths are clean and well-maintained, its vegetation is lush. The shop merchants are friendly and seem to delight in unusual trades. Though little of mine survived the shipwreck, the few trinkets that I'd had on my person or managed to salvage from the shore were deemed unusual enough in that distant realm to obtain a few necessities. I also found the villagers eager to share what they had in return for honest work, so I have survived quite comfortably here.

Village life is one of cheerful routine. The villagers rise at first light to do their chores before the tropical sun reaches its peak. Then, a light midday meal is served. The bulk of the afternoon is reserved for indoor activities: reading and scholastics for the younger population and naps for their elders. Everyone seems to prize this quiet time. When the sun goes down, communal activities are frequent. If there are no weddings or other festivities (I must admit that I am quite fond of these local celebrations), the families often gather informally for a plain but plentiful supper, music, and conversation.

Though most families are modest, none are in want. Servants are used in the more affluent households, but most of the citizens cheerfully rely on their own strong hands for the work of daily life. What serving class exists is generally well-treated, though even in this gentle civilization, I did note a few exceptions.



The Docks

Beyond the village lie the docks, a place of bustle and excitement. Even the humblest citizen of the Isle of the Crown frequently enjoys visiting the other islands in the kingdom. In return, it is not uncommon to see all manner of strange creatures frequenting the village shops from the kingdom's other islands.

All travel between the Islands is focused at the docks and, indeed, at a single vessel. That vessel is simply called "the ferry," and it is a pleasant enough little ship, well-maintained as befits its value to the kingdom. The ferryman is a jolly fellow, patient even with the youngest of his passengers. His young son helps manage the vessel and keep her shipshape.

The story of the ferry is an interesting one, particularly if you recall the fate of my own ship. The islands, it seems, have always been surrounded by terrible eddies and currents that make seagoing nearly impossible. The family that runs the ferry has done so for generations, each father passing on to his son the secret of the tricky navigation. Many believe that the ferryman's family line has an uncanny instinct for the sea around the isles. It is said that they sail "by the blood in their veins." One thing is certain: I would not venture to sail a ship in these waters, so whatever the secrets of the ferryman's family—thank the stars for it!

The Castle of the Crown

The Castle of the Crown is a stunning palace, giving testimony to the skill of the kingdom's architects and the richness of its treasury. The castle is a monument of marble, gold, and precious gems, with tall arched ceilings and artistic fittings. I am told that it was built one hundred



years ago by King Aliphid as a present to his bride, Queen Astar. The previous castle, also called the Castle of the Crown, was large and drafty and had served as the seat of the royal family for over three hundred years. It is said that King Aliphid was cautious over his new bride's fragile health and built the new palace with thick walls for protection from the high winds and cool hallways for respite from the blazing tropical sun.

The castle is made even more exotic by the race of guard dogs that serve and protect the palace. These wondrous creatures seem to combine the best qualities of canine and human. Speaking in gruff voices and armed with swords or pikes, the guard dogs are strong and intelligent, and have loyally served the Crown through the centuries.

Despite my status as a stranger, I was granted a visit with the reigning king and queen. Their openness and accessibility, added to the lack of drawbridges, moats, or battlements of any kind, made clear to me the innocence of this kingdom that had never known war or treachery. Had I been a viper in disguise, I would have been granted an intimate audience just as readily! As a citizen of the larger, more dangerous world, it made me feel a little nervous and honor-bound not to betray such trust in me.

I met the king and queen in the castle's throne room. The throne room is a vast hall more ornate than anything these poor eyes have ever seen. Standing before the two thrones in that cavern of gold, I felt as though I stood before fabled Olympus itself. Yet, raising my eyes up slowly to those noble faces, I saw nothing of judgement in their eyes, nothing of disdain. Indeed, their faces were full of guileless welcome and kindness.

As for the rulers of this kingdom themselves: King Caliphim, though not a large man, has an air of strength and self-assurance about him. He has the face of a scholar and the eyes of a gentle benefactor. Of Queen Allaria, his beautiful wife, my first impression was of hair the color of night and skin as pale as dawn. She smiled at me graciously and I could see the sadness there. For despite the glory of the palace around them, the halls seemed to weigh on the

couple with their emptiness. They are the last of the royal family and, growing into middle age, have yet to produce an heir.

The king and queen listened with interest to my tale of shipwreck. King Caliphim asked astute questions of my homeland and the lands of my travel. He seemed to know something of other lands—perhaps from the same source that had brought the name of the Land of the Green Isles to Daventry. He was most curious, and, as a thinker, seemed intrigued by any new idea I might offer. Unfortunately for him, my ideas on such things as kingdoms and civilizations were rather simple ones. I sensed that, despite his interest, he would be content to have those other kingdoms remain remote from his own. Neither hungry for conquest nor anxious for change, his kingdom would remain isolated. Indeed, except for the lack of an heir, it seemed the good king and queen did provide the kingdom with all it could ever desire.

Having met the royal couple and recovered sufficiently from my ordeal at sea, I began to feel quite curious about the other islands in the kingdom, and so I put my itching feet in the care of the jolly ferryman.



Imagine a place where the very path beneath your feet might complain of your weight and the trees purposely drop twigs on your head for the sheer merriment of it all, and you'll have an idea of what it's like to be on the Isle of Wonder.

The Isle of Wonder is a comma-shaped body of land that might as well resemble a question mark, for confusion and astonishment are sure to be the lot of the unsuspecting visitor.

The island is teeming with life. Vegetation is abundant as are the island's inhabitants. In fact, the two are frequently one and the same. One can scarcely pick up a grain of sand on that shore without it demanding to be put right back...and this instant, if you please!

The history of this unusual island is an issue of fervent speculation. Many believe that it was an uninteresting deserted island until a wizard enchanted the whole place, bringing everything in it to life, and presented it to his daughter as a birthday present. Others say that the island was once the prison of a beautiful princess, held captive there by a powerful and jealous queen. The maiden was so fair that the very trees and stones themselves could not bear to hear her crying and came to life to provide her companionship. Still another group ardently claims that the Creator of the Universe simply got tired of the serious business of life-giving and decided to indulge His or Her sense of humor.

Whatever the origin, a more delightful spot could scarcely be imagined. But be warned! Those travelers who like to know exactly what to expect from life would be well-advised to go elsewhere. While most of the island's inhabitants are friendly, some of the "thornier" natives are capable of being downright rude, and all are quirksome.

Visitors are frequent on the Isle of Wonder, for it offers a refreshing respite from the ho-hum of everyday life. Even the king and queen enjoy a picnic on Exclamation Point or a stroll in the gardens, and they are on occasion to be found there relaxing and passing the time of day with the island's natives.

The rulers of the Isle of Wonder are a pair of queens, rivals in every way, and most frequently to be found arguing over everything from the color of the sky to the consistency of potato hash. Despite their eccentricities, the Isle of Wonder seems to run smoothly and be a flourishing part of the kingdom, providing many valuable exports and lending the kingdom a light-heartedness to counter their more serious countrymen on the Isle of the Sacred Mountain.



PART IV The Isle of the Sacred Mountain

The Isle of the Sacred Mountain, on first impression, appears to be nothing but a great wall of cliffs rising to the sky with no apparent means of scaling it. The visitor is soon met, however, by a pair of "greeters" of the Winged Ones race.

The Winged Ones are the inhabitants of the Isle of the Sacred Mountain. Towering to a height of six to seven feet, the Winged Ones are by far the most impressive creatures I have ever seen. Each one of them, male and female alike, is surpassingly beautiful. Their bodies are muscled and athletic and gleaming with health. From their broad backs mighty wings emerge like secondary limbs, strong and webbed, and covered with large white feathers. And when they spread those massive wings...oh!...it is as if the sun itself is eclipsed.

Two of these creatures, the greeters, meet visitors at the base of the cliffs and so was I met. Gently, they took my arms and flew me upwards. Has there not been a man who has dreamed of flying? Are we all not Icarus in our heart of hearts? Imagine then, the thrill of that flight and the glory of the beings who rule the very air around us!

But, as the old saw warns, "Beauty is only skin deep." I was flown to the Winged Ones' city, a strange and haunting place whose architecture combines the two overriding elements of this culture: aviation and the classical. The city seems built to exclude those poor creatures whose lot it is to crawl like insects upon the ground, for each edifice towers into the sky with no connection to the next or to the ground itself save by flight.

Thus completely dependent on the greeters to travel about the city or even leave, the visitor is humbled and loathe to do much exploration. This appeared to me to be rather the intention, for the culture of the Winged Ones is a private one. On the Isle



of Wonder I always felt welcome, despite the sometimes gruff nature of the inhabitants. They had a certain simplicity, an honesty about them. By contrast, although my reception with the Winged Ones was on the surface extremely polite, the formal words of welcome did not ring true. I sensed, in the eyes of that beauteous race, a disdain of common humanity, a haughtiness that made them suddenly lose some of their golden perfection in the eyes of this humble observer.

Despite this innate sense of superiority, the Winged Ones are valuable members of the kingdom and provide many important skills. Incredibly intelligent, the Winged Ones are master logicians and mathematicians, precise architects and planners. They disdain magic and the daintier arts, being far too logical for such goings on. Even the palace of the Winged Ones' city has a sparseness, a sense of functionality that denotes their contempt for artistic ornamentation.

The Winged Ones' culture is an old one, and they make frequent references to the "Ancient Ones," their forefathers, whose ruins and great works still abound on the island. The Isle of the Sacred Mountain is ruled by a lord and lady, who exist as monarchs on their own island but owe allegiance to the common Crown.

The name of the island derives from a lone peak which soars into the clouds beyond the city. There, in a cave, dwells the sacred Oracle, the philosophical head of the community. It is said that the Oracle is centuries old, ultimately wise, and can read the future. She is consulted by the lord and lady on every facet of the city's life, and even advises the king and queen. I, of course, did not meet the Oracle, and even most Winged Ones citizens regard her as an almost mythical being. The greatest honor any Winged Ones citizen might hope for in his or her long life is to be granted a meeting with the Oracle, for her cave is a place reserved for only the most worthy souls. Like many lofty ambitions, most of the Winged Ones never achieve this end.

I found myself fascinated by the Ancient Ones, for it was the only deep history apparent in the kingdom. From what I managed to learn from the close-mouthed Winged Ones themselves, and from the more readily available information to be found in the writings and from scholars on the Isle of the Crown, I put together the following picture of this bygone race. I include it among these records of the kingdom, for they are as much a presence in the Land as the current inhabitants.



PART V

The Ancient Ones

The Ancient Ones' culture inhabited the Isle of the Sacred Mountain perhaps as much as a thousand years ago. At that time, it is likely that there was no "kingdom" and that the Ancient Ones existed alone in the sea, since no similarly aged records exist on any other island.

The Ancient Ones had an advanced, mysterious culture. Their writings have been discovered on ancient tablets and scrolls buried beneath the current Winged Ones' city, and in the ancient catacombs on the Isle of the Sacred Mountain. It is commonly believed that they possessed knowledge and mechanical acuity far surpassing anything that exists today. This belief is based on a few remaining artifacts such as their mysterious labyrinthine catacombs and the writings on the island's cliffs. The artifacts of the Ancient Ones are fiercely guarded by the Winged Ones and are studied by scholars of that race who spend their whole lives trying to unravel their mysteries. What is known about them derives from these delicate and treasured written records.

The Ancient Ones were believers in the power of language. They were fond of saying, "A master of languages will soar." This, presumably, refers to intellectual heights rather than physical ones, but who can say? It is also known that they were great lovers of symbols and had a complex theology which seemed to worship all things aerial, though only fragments of their belief system are understood today. The Ancient Ones gave meaning to every creature, every color, every element and mineral. In addition, they studied the emotional states of being. Every emotion, like every creature, color, and element, ranked high or low on their theological scale—the lowest being "base" or "primitive," the highest being "pure." At the top of this scale were the Sacred Four; the emotion "tranquility," the color "azure," the creature "caterpillar," and the element "air." The color azure and the element air are obvious allusions to the sky. Similarly, tranquility is reminiscent of the

heavens above. The caterpillar is the one surprise. In their reasoning, however, it makes perfect sense. After all, there are birds aplenty in the skies, but what glory is it to fly when one is born with wings? Is it not more glorious still to be born to crawl upon the ground and build one's own wings?

It is a matter of much debate whether or not the Ancient Ones themselves possessed the power of flight. Despite their theology, the remains of the Ancient Ones do not bear the wings that distinguish the Isle of the Sacred Mountain's current inhabitants. The Winged Ones firmly believe that the Ancient Ones flew without wings, thus proving themselves superior even to the Winged Ones themselves. Some scholars on the Isle of the Crown, however, believe that the Ancient Ones could not fly, and that their obsessive interest in flight and their secret knowledge enabled them to create a winged race, the descendants of whom are the Winged Ones. Ah, but such things we will never know for certain, for true understanding was buried along with the last of that long-dead race.

I spent some time studying the language and culture of the Ancient Ones, and, in the interest of antiquity, I set forth here as much as is understood of their works.



The Ancient Ones' Alphabet

The alphabet of the Ancient Ones consists of graphic symbols. It is clear that their language and ours has the same root, for their writings are directly translatable by simply replacing the appropriate letter of our alphabet for its corresponding symbol in theirs. It is probable that the Ancient Ones spoke in our language and used these symbols in their writings as a code for secrecy or for their ceremonial beauty. Or, perhaps, our own "letters" for the spoken language evolved as short-hand notations for the complex symbols used by the Ancient Ones. In any case, there are twenty-six primary symbols in their alphabet. There are other minor symbols, but those were used only for accent and as representations of complex philosophical ideals and are not included here.

In addition to their alphabetical functions, each symbol also represents an emotion, a color, a creature, and a natural or metaphysical element.



A This symbol represents harmony, the cat, the color sienna, and earth.



B This symbol represents sorrow, the albatross, the color charcoal-gray, and onyx.



C This symbol represents hope, the dove, the color pearl-gray, and opals.



D This symbol represents tranquility, the mouse, the color sable, and granite.



E This symbol represents irony, the whale, the color ochre, and paper.



F This symbol represents humility, the grasshopper, the color olive, and plants.



G This symbol represents purity, the unicorn, the color white, and air.



H This symbol represents rage, the shark, the color red, and fire.

	I	<i>This symbol represents cowardice, the sheep, the color orange, and coal.</i>		R	<i>This symbol represents grief, the jackal, the color silver, and the element silver.</i>
	J	<i>This symbol represents honesty, the parrot, the color green, and emeralds.</i>		S	<i>This symbol represents happiness, the dog, the color pink, and marble.</i>
	K	<i>This symbol represents wisdom, the owl, the color brown, and wood.</i>		T	<i>This symbol represents perseverance, the tortoise, the color sea-green, and water.</i>
	L	<i>This symbol represents loneliness, the cricket, the color beige, and clay.</i>		U	<i>This symbol represents intuition, the serpent, the color royal-blue, and rain.</i>
	M	<i>This symbol represents romantic love, the swan, the color gold and the element gold.</i>		V	<i>This symbol represents foolishness, the monkey, the color yellow, and ivory.</i>
	N	<i>This symbol represents hate, the crab, the color black, and ebony.</i>		W	<i>This symbol represents familial love, the horse, the color hazel, and leather.</i>
	O	<i>This symbol represents joy, the dolphin, the color azure, and sapphires.</i>		X	<i>This symbol represents bravery, the lion, the color purple, and diamonds.</i>
	P	<i>This symbol represents fear, the rabbit, the color violet, and rubies.</i>		Y	<i>This symbol represents patience, the cow, the color amber, and pearls.</i>
	Q	<i>This symbol represents faith, the caterpillar, the color turquoise, and the stone turquoise.</i>		Z	<i>This symbol represents desire, the warthog, the color burgundy, and garnets.</i>

The Logic Cliffs

One of the most intriguing artifacts left by the Ancient Ones are the logic cliffs. The cliffs are so named from a series of riddles written on the face of the cliffs leading from the beach of the Isle of the Sacred Mountain to the Winged Ones' city. Chiseled painstakingly into solid rock, the viewer must question what purpose the words serve. From the ancient scroll that references the cliffs, it can be determined that the riddles on the cliff were part of an elaborate mechanism designed to protect those who dwelt at the top of the cliffs from undesirables that might arrive from the sea below. The mechanism may have served as some sort of calling device designed to alert those at the top of the cliffs that a brother required admittance, or perhaps led to secret chambers within the rock itself. Whatever the cliffs' purpose was, it was obviously built to admit only those indoctrinated into the secrets of the Ancient Ones' culture and for that reason is, alas, as yet unsolved by those who live today.

The following translations from the cliffs of logic scroll may help the reader understand the mystique that surrounds this artifact.

The first challenge: "Only those pure of heart will be able to RISE the cliffs of logic."

The third challenge: "The Stones of Stealth," are associated with this riddle:

*Four men standing in a row,
Third from the left and down you go,
The rest, in order, move you on,
The Youngest, the Oldest, and the Second Son.*

The fifth challenge: "Only those of the highest order may ASCEND the cliffs of logic."



The Catacombs

Another remnant of the Ancient Ones' culture, the catacombs, is tragically inaccessible to visitors today. The catacombs held the burial chambers of the Ancient Ones, and are said to be designed as a giant labyrinth. To protect their tombs from looters, the Ancient Ones built death traps into the catacombs and filled it with dead-end paths, maze-like corridors, and rooms where secret knowledge is needed to pass.

The Winged Ones were close to mastering the secrets of the catacombs some years ago, when a minotaur, taking an instant liking to the dark, funereal place, decided to take up residence. At first, the kingdom attempted to regain the hostaged artifact, but, between the dangers of the catacombs itself and the minotaur's stealth and treachery, the losses became too grave to continue the struggle and the minotaur was left to his prize. Since then, the catacombs have been bolted shut. It is one of the great sorrows of the kingdom that each year the minotaur demands, and must be given, the living sacrifice of his choice lest he emerge from the catacombs and attack the city.

The catacombs are illustrative of the Ancient Ones' obsessive interest in death. Indeed, it seems to be in the air in this part of the world, for the modern-day Green Islanders also have elaborate death traditions, as I will describe later. The catacombs were obviously a place of high reverence for the Ancient Ones, as a message on an ancient tablet that once adorned the doors to the catacombs shows:

*Three roses laid upon the bower,
A scythe for he who cuts the flower,
A crown, a dove, most noble race!
Thy bones make sacred this dread place.*

PART VI The Isle of the Beast

The Isle of the Beast, long ago, was called the Isle of the Forest. It was a place of woodlands, sparkling ponds, and prolific wildlife. It was used as a playground favored for jaunty hunts by the royal family and other local sportsmen, and for that reason was left uninhabited. The scenes of this treasured diversion on that beautiful island still decorate local tapestries and paintings.

One night, so the story goes, residents of the other islands could see magical lights around the Isle of the Forest. The next day the king, then King Aliphim, led his guards over to the island to investigate (and, of course, to hunt if all proved well). They found the island much changed. The forest had grown so dense overnight as to prove impenetrable save by a single path blocked by mysterious obstacles. And, most mysteriously of all, the heart-rending cries of some mighty wild beast echoed on and on throughout the forest. It is said that several guards fell into madness immediately at the sound and that King Aliphim himself was haunted to the end of his days by the echo of those cries.

Since that time, the island has taken its new name and has remained unpene-trated, and undisturbed, in the midst of the kingdom's teaming life.



PART VII Legends and Myths of the Land of the Green Isles

Through long nights spent before the fire with my companions on the Isle of the Crown, I learned that the Green Islanders are famous story-weavers. To me, nothing speaks more of a people than the tales they tell, for they are woven with the fears, the hopes, and the dreams of the culture. For your enlightenment and entertainment, I set forth some of the more interesting of these legends and myths here.

Hidden Islands and Other Worlds

Every land has its tales of hidden places: lost caverns, underground treasure rooms, and secret kingdoms accessible only through some ancient oak tree. The Land of the Green Isles is no exception. Here, as might be imagined, the hidden places take the form of islands hidden in the mists and of what might lie beyond in the sea.

One popular tale seems to reflect the universal myths of harvest and planting. It is said that nearby exists a hidden island of priestly inhabitants who worship Mother Earth. These priests keep the weather and the tides in balance to insure safety from hurricanes and other forces of the sea and to plead continuance for the kingdom's bounty. It is said that these priests demand privacy above all and that they remain loyal to the Crown in exchange for secrecy. What a wonderfully conspiratorial tale!



The Green Islanders are also fond of saying that the unpassable currents in the seas around the kingdom are there as a warning—to keep all ships from sailing further east. For it is believed that within a day's sail in that direction a ship strong enough and foolhardy enough to survive the tempest seas would encounter the edge of the world!

“What lies beyond the edge of the world,” I asked. “Why, the next world,” they replied, and with fearful glances at one another, quickly changed the subject.

Death Traditions

Death fascinates men the world round, and there are as many philosophies about what comes after this life as there are, it seems, lives which end. I found the Green Islanders to all share a common belief, so strongly held as to seem to defy questioning.

The family of the deceased hold funeral ceremonies a few days after death to bid the soul of their loved one safe passage to the Realm of the Dead. The deceased is buried with the things he or she will need for the journey.

The Realm of the Dead is a place not of this world. There Death himself rules. Some call him The Lord of the Dead, others call him Samhain. Those souls who have died at peace with their lives are allowed to enter the



Underworld and are placed in the Sea of Souls. In that safe repository, they are greeted by ultimate knowledge and are prepared for the next stage. Those souls, however, who died with unresolved trauma in their human lives cannot enter the underworld, but are consigned to wander endlessly on the surface of the Realm, chained there by their human woes. Sometimes, their life's problems will be resolved in the real world without them—justice meted out, or loved ones taken care of—and they are freed from their bonds and gratefully go below. More often, however, things are never resolved in the real world and the bonded souls, over time, become part of the mindless dead that roam the surface eternally, never to know peace or be allowed to move on.

This belief system deeply affects the lives of the Green Islanders, and is, in my estimation, the root of their peaceful lives and their aversion for friction and infighting, greed and anxiety. Certainly, as a man or woman approaches old age or infirmity, he or she strives to resolve any loose ends in their lives in preparation for the journey ahead.

Genies

In Daventry, the poor man's idea of a great tale involved a tradesman or poor farmer falling in with a fairy and thus gaining a fortune overnight. How many wild-eyed dreamers have spent their days searching out such instant prosperity instead of buckling down and taking the long road to that end? Hah! It is a tale this wanderer has heard all too often!

Here in the Land of the Green Isles there are no fewer dreamers, but they speak not of fairies but of the djinn, of genies. A genie is an even greater temptation for the aspiring soul than ever a Daventry fairy, for a genie does not sim-

ply turn a one-time favor, however great, and then be done with it. No, a genie, like a faithful dog, belongs to its owner for life—or, that is, for however long the fortunate "master" might keep hold of the creature's lamp.

It seems every Green Islander knows the ins and outs of the djinn, though few have ever seen one. According to the stated "rules," each genie is immortal and each is permanently attached to a given lamp in which they might or might not be trapped for long centuries depending on the whims of their owner or fate. Once the lamp comes into the possession of a man or woman, that person becomes the genie's master and must be obeyed. Genies are very valuable creatures and can do a variety of tricks including transporting a man anywhere on earth, taking any shape the master might wish, and, of course, the ever-popular gathering of great treasures and wealth. A genie does



have some limitations, however: it cannot cure ills, change the weather, or bring back the dead. And a genie always has a weakness.

A genie is also bound to its master in other ways. It is said that a genie is like a mirror; it only reflects its master's will. If a master is evil-minded and cruel, the genie will be also. If a master is generous and kind, so will be the genie.

One of the most popular genie stories is the following one about a genie named Mali Mellin.

The Story of Mali Mellin

Mali Mellin was a genie with a terrible weakness for mistletoe berries (although the same are poisonous to humans). He had been trapped for a few thousand years in a crusty old lamp after being buried with his possessive master. One day a poor farmer uncovered the lamp while plowing a field. The farmer, being ignorant, took the lamp at once to his wife, and she, being no more intelligent than he, cleaned the outside brusquely without ever opening the lid. The pair took the lamp to market to sell for a few pence.

The lamp was purchased by a antiquities dealer, who, being equally lazy, never bothered to open the thing. (This tale continues on in this manner, passing through a dozen or so hands, much to the increased hilarity of the local listeners who seem to find this the largest joke they ever heard. But, to move on....)

Finally the lamp was purchased by a poor maiden named Daltina, who desired only a little warmth and light for her ailing mother. Daltina took the lamp home and opened it at once in order to fill it with and a wick. But instead of dust, a cloud of smoke issued forth from the opened lamp and Mali Mellin appeared. The girl was overcome with fear, but Mali Mellin finally persuaded the poor thing that she was in no danger, and, indeed, could now have anything she wished for.

In the next few months, Daltina and her mother went from being poor, sickly outcasts to being well-to-do. Their poor house became a fine mansion and their garden blossomed. The girl, with the flush of prosperity in her cheeks, grew more beautiful by the day. Mali Mellin, of course, was furnished with all the mistletoe berries he could eat. But on one thing, Daltina followed the advice of her mother;

"Never tell anyone of the lamp," she warned, "for we are but two lone women in the world and would be no match for those who would wish to steal our treasure."

Several years passed this way, and Daltina was content. Every night Mali Mellin would ask her, "What more do you wish?" and Daltina would reply "Nothing. I have all that I want." Then, one day, a procession rode through the village. Riding at the head was a prince, the most handsome man that the girl had ever seen.

That night, Mali Mellin asked "What more do you wish?" The girl was silent for a moment, thinking "Who am I to wish such a thing?" and "He should marry a princess." But her heart, never before touched, clamored too loudly for her to hear her own wisdom and so she whispered, "I wish for the prince."

The next day the prince rode back to the village with haunted eyes. He had seen the girl in a dream and was sick with love. Within weeks, the two were married.

But the prince was not as good as he appeared. He wanted things: more wealth, more land, more of everything. When he mooned about for these things, the girl felt pity in her love and would in secret go to her lamp and call forth Mali Mellin to achieve her love's desires.

At first, the prince was amazed at his wife's powers and intuition. After a time, however, the prince grew suspicious of his wife's seemingly magical abilities. One night, he lamented long about a certain gold sword he must have that hung in a nearby castle. He pretended to go to sleep and heard Daltina slip out. In silence, he followed her down a corridor to her mother's room and there spied upon her as she called Mali Mellin from the lamp and, offering it some pretty mistletoe, asked her boon.



"Mali Mellin," Daltina said, "There is a sword of gold ten leagues from here. Have it delivered to my husband in the morning as a gift of tribute." To which, Mali Mellin replied, "Yes, Master."

The next morning, a courier arrived with the sword, just as Mali Mellin had promised.

"How marvelous," the prince thought, "to have a wife with such a powerful genie!" Then he thought, "How much more marvelous to possess the genie myself!"

And so, that very night, the prince waited until Daltina slept, then snuck into his mother-in-law's chambers and removed the lamp from the trunk as he

X.
had seen his wife do. Seized with excitement, he hastened to his armory and pulled the lid from the lamp. Mali Mellin appeared.

"Yes, Master," the genie twittered, with a new malicious grin on its face. "You are *MY* genie now," said the prince, "And shall do only as I wish." "Of course, Master," said Mali Mellin, "But how about some mistletoe?"

The next day, the girl awoke to find the prince in possession of the lamp. Despite her pleadings that she be allowed to control the dangerous creature, the prince refused to give it back.

And, oh, what the prince did with that lamp! Whereas before, the girl had indulged his desires conservatively, the prince with the lamp knew no bounds. He kept Mali Mellin rushing to fulfill his wishes until the rooms of the castle were heaping with gold and jewels. His enemies lay slaughtered on the fields without provocation. Mali Mellin's wicked face now became like a demon's in the land, a demon who stole and laid scourge to everything.

Finally, the girl could stand no more. The flame of her love for the prince was doused by bitter tears. One night, she drugged the prince's wine and, when he fell into a deep sleep, took the lamp from his grasp. She called forth the genie once more, and, sadly, had Mali Mellin carry the prince off to a distant and deserted land where he could trouble no one ever again. With the prince gone and Mali Mellin back to his good-natured self, Daltina restored the broken land and reigned as a benign (if rather melancholy) queen for many years thereafter—reaping, always, plentiful harvests of mistletoe.

PART VIII Postscript

So concludes my records on the Land of the Green Isles. I have been well-treated here and have become rich in friends, in knowledge, and in countless other blessings. Though I have found my spirit forlorn at times with my inability to travel on, I must admit that my feet have itched less here than anywhere else in this wide world. Still, on occasion, I find my mind roving back to the green hills of Daventry. Perhaps, if my spirit, at least, is allowed to roam free, I've yet to see them soon.

To those who may someday follow in my footsteps, I say this; Be kind to this gentle land, be open-hearted to her whimsy, and protect her, if you can, from the harsh winds which might wish to blow in from the sea to steal her soul. She is unlike any place I have ever seen, and she has stolen my heart.

Derek Karlavaegen



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